9. CRANE MIGRATION THROUGH BALUCHISTAN: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

(With a text-figure)

Introduction

Three crane species, i.e., the Common Crane (*Grus grus lilfordi*), the Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) and the Siberian Crane (*Grus leucogeranus*) are known to migrate through or over Pakistan in spring and in fall en route to their wintering grounds in India from their normal summering grounds at higher latitudes in Soviet Russia (Roberts and Landfried 1982), though scattered birds have been reported to spend their winters in paddy fields in the Punjab and in desert steppes of Sibi, Kachhi and Nasirabad in Baluchistan. All the presently available reports have placed emphasis on the Kurrum Valley in the N.W.F.P. (Ali and Ripley 1969) and the valley of the River Zhob in the northwestern part of Baluchistan (Landfried 1982, 1983; Roberts 1977), though Archibald (1979) suggested that the records on the distribution and migration of the cranes were very vague. The present paper presents some very preliminary data on the overall migratory pattern of the Common and the Demoiselle cranes through Baluchistan.

Material and Methods

A tour of the different areas of Baluchistan, i.e. Zhob, Chagai, Kharan, Khuzdar and Sibi was undertaken in different parts of the wintering season, i.e. October through March for the last three consecutive years (1982 through 1984) in connection with our study on the biology and ecology of the Houbara Bustard. During this tour the crane migration was physically observed in different areas. Excited by the sighting of the migrating cranes in certain areas we interviewed a number of local hunters, local populace and the field staff of the Provincial Forest Department so as to extract information regarding

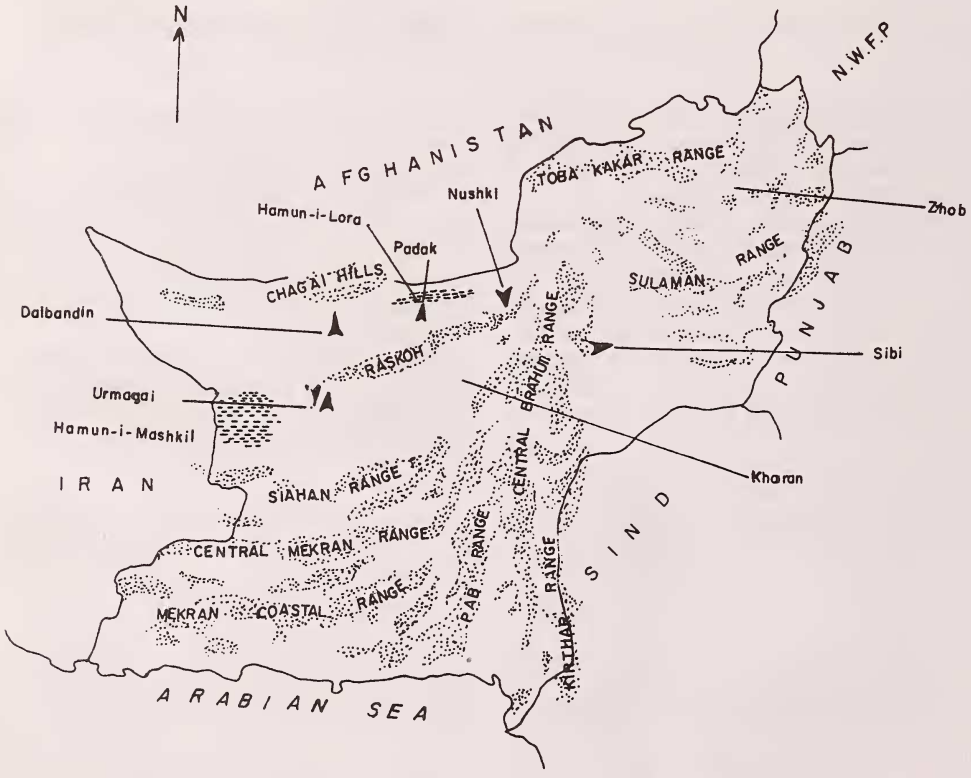

Fig. 1. Line sketch of Baluchistan, showing approximate location of the sighting of flocks of cranes and tentative migratory routes. The point of the arrow (▲) indicates the direction of the flying flock observed.

their observations on cranes in their respective areas. The data collected through the interviews was corroborated with our personal observations and was consolidated to evolve a tentative migratory pattern.

Results and Discussion

The relevant information regarding sighting of six different flocks of cranes in different areas of Baluchistan is presented in Table 1. Fig. 1 presents a tentative localization of the places on the line sketch. The flocks observed in late March or early April in Dalbandine, Padak and Urmagai with a northward direction of the flight were probably on a spring migration to their summering grounds, while the flocks located in Nushki and Urmagai in the month of October, flying in a southward direction were on their autumn migration towards their wintering grounds. The flock observed in Sibi in late November suggested that these birds comprised a part of a group which winters in the area. It was not possible for us to differentiate between the Common Cranes and the Demoiselle Cranes, but we presume that most of these flocks represented the Demoiselle Cranes. No Siberian Crane was, however, observed. The flock of about 150 cranes observed in Put Chatao area of the Padak on 25th March 1984 had probably passed the previous night in the area and it suddenly took off at about 11.00 A.M. and started its northward migration after hovering over the area for sometime. The nomadic camp-mate settled in the area told us that there were many cranes in the area the previous day and that most of these had probably left the area in the morning.

Our interviews with the local populace suggested that the cranes could be observed for a few days in September-October and in March-April, in Nushki, Padak, Dalbandine, Urmagai, Khuzdar, and Zhob, but not at other times of the year. In Sibi, however, cranes can be observed throughout the winter, though now as a very scattered population, near the paddy fields or near the marshes created by the accumulation of the rain and/or irrigational water. The local inhabitants of the area could not distinguish between the Common Cranes and the Demoiselle Cranes. They call the cranes '*Karkara*' in Zhob (Pushto) and '*Khaakhur*' in Chagai and Kharan (Baluchi). There was no report of seeing the Siberian crane in the area in living memory. The cranes are said to settle in the vicinity of 'Hamuns' (Hamun-i-Lora, Hamun-i- Mashkhel) and 'Kirks' (both Hamuns and Kirks indicate the depressions where the rain water of the area accumulates and forms a marshy area after the drying up of the water, leaving open flat ground) in Chagai and Kharan. They spend 2-3 days in the area, resting briefly in their long flight from or to their wintering areas.

Table 1

A SUMMARY OF THE DATA REGARDING SIGHTING OF CRANES IN SOUTHWESTERN BALUCHISTAN

Date	Area	Approx. Flock Size	Direction of Flight
3 April 1982	Dalbandine	100	North
25 March 1984	Padak	150	North
27 March 1984	Urmagai	50	North
23 October 1984	Nushki	50	South
30 October 1984	Urmagai	50	South
23 November 1984	Sibi	50	East

The present preliminary report is the first which indicates that the cranes exploit a much more diffused migratory route than hitherto recognized. Most of the previous reports tend to place emphasis on the Indus River Valley as the main migratory route of all the three species of cranes which happen to migrate from the northern latitudes to pass their winters in the Indian sub- continent (Ali and Ripley 1969, 1977; Landfried 1982, 1983; Roberts and Landfried 1982), though Landfried (1983) has confirmed the cranes' migration through Valley of the River Zhob. Our results suggest that the cranes probably have a much diffused entry point into Baluchistan extending from Zhob to the western flank of the Chagai. It seems that the cranes generally avoid very high mountains during their migration and hence select certain entry points through the valleys. Thus, in western Baluchistan, the birds avoid the Chagai hills and the Raskoh Range. They have not been observed very often in the eastern Kharan, suggesting that the cranes entering the Chagai through diffused routes move into the Kharan mainly through its western part, and probably pass into the Khuzdar area and finally to Sibi, Kachhi, Nasirabad and the Rann of Kutch. Further studies are needed to confirm the exact route exploited for the migration in the area. The population entering through Zhob probably directly enter Dara Ghazi Khan and to other parts of the country.

Though considerable trapping of the cranes is done in the northern areas of Baluchistan, i.e. Zhob, where cranes happen to pass through very defined routes and through narrow valleys, no such regular trapping has been reported in southwestern Baluchistan, except for some very sporadic shooting. This is understandable as in this area, the migration routes are very diffused, extending over 300 km,

making it hard to select points for organized trapping parties for mass trapping. This may suggest that this migratory route exploited by the cranes is rather safe and may help in the survival of the species.

It is not possible on the basis of the presently available information to decide whether the selection of this route is made at random by birds in the different Russian breeding populations, or whether some definite populations pass through this route, leaving the other populations to use the migratory route located in the north. Further ringing data may yield interesting information regarding this aspect of the biolgy of species of cranes. It may yield some positive clue regarding the exploitation of this route by the endangered Siberian Crane, if concentrated efforts are taken to determine the extent of exploitation of this migration route by the Siberian Cranes, which may be a considerably safer route for the few individuals of the species now left for future generations.

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10. UNUSUAL INTERACTIONS FOR FOOD

While watching raptors in Keoladeo National Park during the 1985-86 winter, an interesting behaviour among other birds was observed. Around the end of January, painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) young, though fully fledged and out of their nests were still dependent on adults for food. The young in large groups on bare mounds would clamour noisily to be fed on seeing any adult alighting nearby with a begging display that involves deep bowing undulations of the head with wings wide-spread. Egrets on noticing this would hopefully alight nearby waiting patiently ready to pirate or snatch a morsel with a lightning dash during the actual regurgitating feeding act should the opportunity arise. They would then move position from one repleted young to another that was being fed. This behaviour was consistently observed as long as the young continued to be fed. On other occasions egrets were observed to fly in from neighbouring blocks solely on hearing painted stork young begging for food. I have seen egrets flying over from B block to L block, this behaviour being activated on hearing the young's begging vocal display as they could not have witnessed the food bringing arrivals of the adult painted storks, who were observed to delay and sometimes even interrupt feeding to drive off nearby egrets. This behaviour appears odd in the light that the egrets were rarely successful in grabbing a beakfull. They were almost totally dependent on their own hunting ability and yet persisted with this activity. As soon as feeding was over they would promptly leave the immediate area.

On another occasion a painted stork adult was chased and driven up again into the air by a Blacknecked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) just as it was approaching its young clicking its mandibles. The blacknecked stork followed it persistently for about 15 seconds till it disgorged a few small fish meant for its young. The Blacknecked Stork was then rejoined by its mate and as they flew across the bund separating L.W. from B block they were determinedly mobbed and chased by the pirated painted stork.

October 29, 1986. RISHAD NAOROJI